



U.S. Immigration
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News Release

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TUNNEL DISCOVERED BETWEEN CANADA AND U.S.; JOINT INVESTIGATION LEADS TO ARREST OF DRUG SMUGGLERS *-- First Tunnel Ever Discovered on U.S.-Canadian Border --*

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON -- Three men are under arrest and a lengthy investigation is continuing into a sophisticated tunnel running from British Columbia, Canada, into Washington State. The tunnel, located just east of the Lynden/Aldergrove border crossing has been under construction for more than a year.

The tunnel is approximately 360 feet long and runs at a depth of between three and ten feet. It is reinforced with iron rebar and 2x 6 wood supports. Both Canadian and American law enforcement have been monitoring the construction of the tunnel and today shut the tunnel down after a lengthy investigation into the individuals involved in building the tunnel, and using it for illegal drug trafficking.

In particular, FRANCIS DEVANDRA RAJ, 30, TIMOTHY WOO, 34, and JOHNATHAN VALENZUELA, 27, all of Surrey, BC, were charged today in U.S. District Court in Seattle with Conspiracy to Distribute Marijuana, and Conspiracy to Import Marijuana. RAJ owns the property on the Canadian side of the border where the entrance to the tunnel is hidden under a Quonset hut. On the American side, the tunnel terminates beneath the living room floor of a home located at 151 East Boundary Road, in Lynden, Washington. Construction of the tunnel was completed in early July 2005.

Using a delayed notice search warrant, agents entered the home July 2, 2005, to examine the tunnel. Shortly thereafter, a U.S. District Judge authorized the installation of cameras and listening devices in the home to monitor activities in the home.

Using these devices, agents from various federal, state and local law enforcement authorities, including the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), observed multiple trips by RAJ, WOO, and VALENZUELA through the tunnel carrying large hockey bags or garbage bags.

The bags were loaded into a van on the U.S. side and then driven south for delivery. In one instance, the hockey bags and garbage bags were loaded at the house into an SUV with Utah plates. The conspirators then delivered the car to a woman with a small child at Bellis Fair Mall. The Washington State Patrol stopped the car loaded with 93 pounds of marijuana in Ellensburg, Washington.

Although tunnels have been found at the southern border of the United States, this is the first tunnel ever discovered between Canada and the United States.

“The presence of a tunnel on our northern border threatens the security of both countries, whether it is used to smuggle drugs, contraband or even terrorists,” stated United States Attorney John McKay. “Shutting it down, just as it is completed, is a huge blow to these criminals.”

"This tunnel was ambitious, sophisticated and an example of the lengths individuals and criminal organizations will go to for illegal profits. Thanks to an intelligence-led investigation and a coordinated approach between Canadian and U.S. agencies it has been shut down," said Inspector Pat Fogarty, Officer in Charge of CFSEU-BC Team 3.

Canada's Border Services Agency became aware of possible tunnel construction in February 2005 and alerted the Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit (CFSEU-BC). Canadian and American law enforcement organizations coordinated their efforts to make sure all activity in the tunnel was monitored and that prosecutions could proceed on both sides of the border. The tunnel will now be destroyed so it cannot be used for any smuggling or other illegal activities.

Special Agent in Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration, Seattle Field Division, Rodney Benson stated “this tunnel seizure, the first of its kind on the United States and Canada border, is one of only 34 cross-border tunnels ever discovered in the United States. This unregulated and uncontrolled point of entry could have constituted a real threat to the United States, not only in terms of drug trafficking, but to the national security of our nation.”

“The security of our borders remains paramount to the success of both countries to protect our citizens against those who would harm us,” said Leigh Winchell, Special Agent in Charge of the Seattle Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office of Investigations. “ICE remains committed to working with all our partners on both sides of the border to ensure the freedoms that we and our neighbors to the north enjoy.”

“In this investigation the spirit of cooperation and coordination between law enforcement agencies in both the U.S. and Canada is unprecedented. It should serve as a guidepost in targeting organized criminal groups willing to harm this country,” stated Ronald H. Henley, Chief Patrol Agent, Customs and Border Protection.

In addition to officers and agents from DEA, ICE, CBP, RCMP, and CFSEU-BC, officers and agents from Canada Border Services Agency, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives (ATF) as well as the Washington State Patrol and Northwest Drug Task Force participated in the investigation.

The three men arrested will make their initial appearances in U.S. District Court in Seattle at 2:30 today.

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ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.